14: Brant E-5 (1949-50) 1954 APl Burma
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## INTRODUCTION

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122 This paper is a summary report of field research which I conducted in the village of Tadagale, Insein District, Burma, during the period November, 1949, to April, 1950. The work was made possible by a scholarship under the Fulbright Program, supplemented by an Area Research Training Fellowship granted by the Social Science Research Council. I am indebted to both of these organizations for the support of my work.

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121 A word seems in order concerning the selection of Tadagale as a community for study. It was my original intention, before I reached Burma and learned in detail of the then prevailing conditions, to do fieldwork among the Burmese of the delta or dry zone, using as a base a single village which would more or less exemplify contemporary Burmese peasant culture. Nothing was more impossible, in view of the internal conditions, and the plan had to be abandoned. After several months of efforts to shift my research to the Shan States, during which time one project had to be abandoned before it actually commenced, and another came to an abrupt halt in its second week -- both because of the spread of the internal disturbances to the areas concerned -- it became clear that the greatest assurance of continuity of research was to be found in the general area near Rangoon. After a brief survey of communities within a few miles radius of the capital, Tadagale was chosen. It appeared most suitable for several reasons, among them accessibility, manageable size, and, owing to its contacts with Rangoon, the possibility of studying socio-cultural change.

● DH The fieldwork was done by interviewing of informants, by direct observation of events and behavior, and by the compilation of a detailed census concerning household membership, occupations, marital status, religious affiliation, group membership, income, and other matters. With the aid of a fluent, college-educated interpreter fieldwork was carried on daily.

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121 This paper does not purport in any way to be a complete or definitive study. An approximation to such a report, I am convinced, can result only from fieldwork done under a set of conditions very different from those that were possible for the research here reported. These should include extended continuous residence (minimally one year) in the community by the investigator, and participation by him in community life without self-imposed or assumed separateness or distinction from the people; and a command of the native language adequate to conduct interviews and conversations without the use of interpreters. For Southeast Asia especially, the real fulfillment of such conditions is most difficult, but to the extent that they are met in ethnographic work the material obtained will possess richness and depth. Since, for a variety of reasons, these conditions could not be met in my study of Tadagale, no apology is offered for the inadequacies of this report. It is well, however, in these days of studies of 'cultures from afar' and other short-cut methods of fieldwork, to indicate how we have worked and how our results are thereby affected. Since knowledge of contemporary Burmese village culture is virtually non-existent, a report such as this perhaps may be regarded as a small contribution towards filling a large void.

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122 I am much indebted to Miss C. A. Rustom, of Mandalay, my interpreter, whose tact and insight certainly minimized the limitations that are inherent in fieldwork done by means of an interpreter. Dr. Paul F. Cressey of Wheaton College (Massachusetts), who was teaching in Rangoon University at the time of

21: Htin Aung E-5 (ca. 1930) 1937 AP1 Burma
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preserved in their entirety except the *Waythandaya*, and even that is extant with only two scenes missing, while respecting the lost scenes themselves some accounts are preserved. His works have been also studied widely and editorial prefaces to his works offer adequate accounts of his life and writings. Moreover, many courtiers of U Pon Nya's time are still living, and from them first-hand accounts have been obtained by scholars of the present day. After all, U Pon Nya's period is very recent.[1]

For the decadent period, 1878 to 1886, I was dependent on oral accounts of the plays until I went to England. Printing came into general use in Burma during this period and very great numbers of plays were printed. From the Government register of published books we learn that as many as three or four editions of 5,000 copies each of the more famous plays of the period were sold out a few weeks after publication. Yet search as I might, I could not find any copies of the plays in Burma. I discovered later that every one of the more famous plays, with about a hundred less-known plays of the period, are happily preserved in the British Museum. Incidentally, I found that the oral accounts regarding them were correct.

References to historical events and to non-dramatic works made in the thesis are taken from standard works.

As regards my dependence on oral tradition, there is this to be said. The oral accounts of a less civilized nation may be more imaginative than accurate, but with the Burmese everything points to the reliability of the tradition. After all, it goes back to only about two hundred years, and the intervening period is not so long as to undermine human memory. Moreover, as I have said, the truth of the tradition can be ascertained from other sources. It should be remembered that in a country where printing was not in general use until about 1860, and records and literary works were written on palm-leaf and parchment, both of which are very liable to destruction by

[1] My chief informants for the period are:

1. Myothawundauk-kadaw, wife of the Myothawundauk, who distinguished himself in the defence of the palace during the Myingun Rebellion mentioned in the chapter on U Pon Nya. She was a lady-in-waiting at court during the last two reigns.

2. My mother's elder brother. My maternal grandfather was Naymyo Thiri Kyawhtin Nawyahta, Minister for Revenue at Minhla, and an 'honorary poet to the court' in the last two reigns.